

Oral history with 83 year old female, Colorado (Transcription)

m9 A(1)

Int: And I'm <gap> interviewing <gap> of Fruita, Colorado. Today we want to talk about Atchee, where <gap> lived. <gap> what can you tell us about Atchee?

Inf: Well, there's always a reason for a town to be developed, and the reason for Atchee was to maintain the equipment on the old UINTAH (name?) Railroad. And that railroad was built all out to Gilsonite and the mines over at Dragon and Rainbow, Utah. They was about two hundred people that lived in Atchee, and the company owned all of the houses. And, but my husband and I went up there in '21 and bought a, bought the store.

Int: What kind of a store was it?

Inf: General merchandise. We had groceries, meat market, a few dry goods, and then, then we had the post office.

Int: But you didn't work for the Gilsonite company or the railroad.

Inf: No. We were the only people in the, in the whole town that was not employed by the railroad. And, we ... (pauses)

Int: You haven't told us where Atchee is exactly.

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Inf: It's in the north part of Mesa County, I mean Garfield County. North and west of Mack, Colorado. Twenty-eight and three tenths miles north of Mack. And this was a complete railroad shop

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They could build all of their equipment from the blueprint up--engines, cars, and all other equipment. Of course they was track men that located at Atchee to maintain the tracks. And this little railroad was called the "crookedest railroad in the United States." And the, the engineering of it was considered one of the finest pieces of work that was anywhere around. And in the summer months we always had special trains carrying students from the School of Mines, from all over the United States. We even had them there from Japan and Germany. And the grade on this was from one to seven percent, and the curvature was from one to eighty degrees.

Int: Was this a narrow-gauge line?

Inf: Yes, it was a narrow gauge line, mm-hm.

Int: And where did it run?

Inf: It run from Mack, Colorado to Watson, Utah. And there was a spur built up to Rainbow Mine from Watson. But the main line ran from Mack to Watson, Utah.

Int: Was Atchee on the way between Mack and ...

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Inf: Oh yes, Atchee is at the foot of Baxter Pass.

Int: Oh.

Inf: And in the thirteen miles there's 237 curves, and, well several bridges. I'd have to look that up. But it's really a crooked road. And they, the general manager had a little Ford car. Well, at first it was a Buick car that they had taken the wheels off of it and put wheels on it that could run on the tracks. And that's the way the "big boys" got around, in that Buick car. And then, then afterwards they'd take a little old Ford coupe, and put the falanged wheels on it and run it up and down the track. And of course it was a lot

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of fun to ride up on the train to the top of the pass and then come down on a flat car.

Int: I heard it was a steep road, wasn't it?

Inf: It sure was. You'd have to have somebody on that brake who knew his business or you'd be going too fast.

Int: How did you get the supplies for your store?

Inf: Well, at first we had them shipped-in from Grand Junction and to Mack, and then, they would bring them up on the train. But after awhile my husband, we decided that was no good, so he appealed to the Garfield County Commissioners, and got a grader and he bought a tractor and built a road out of there. And so then we got our own truck where we

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could truck there and step-in. And that was quite a heyday because there was no bridges over the washes, and when the people would come down, they generally would four or five drive together so that if anybody got stuck, why they could pull them out. And we had many exciting things that happened there. We had our own little orchestra. Then when the new schoolhouse was built, oh I, we insisted that they fix it so that we could roll back the partition and have it all in one room so that we could dance. And that was quite a thing for everybody come to the dances and bring their children and they'd turn their seats towards the wall and make their beds for the children so they could go to sleep. Then we'd dance the rest of the night. And then in the winter time, why we skied and coasted. So it, life wasn't dull.

Int: You told me Atchee was a modern town. What did you mean by that?

Inf: It had, all the houses had steam heat and running water, and

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they were little five-room bungalows, and so, and electrically. Of course you had to go to bed at 11:30 because the lights went off.

Int: Tell, how about trees?

Inf: Well, in the town there was no trees at all. That I coaxed and begged the company to set out some trees because we had worked up an interest among the employees before everybody was beautifying their homes, and the sweet peas especially were wonderful up there. And for a number of years I supplied the LaCourt Hotel with sweet peas. They kept them in every room. I picked apple fox (name?) for those sweet peas, sent them down and

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Miss Buthorn would pick them up at the station down at Mack and use them in the Hotel. And they were so big and long-stemmed, you could just eat most anything with them. But after I coaxed and the general manager (unintelligible) the trees, one day he came up there and he had the trees all on a flat car and he said, "Now you get out there and get them all planted." And I did, with the help of all of the men who worked there in the shop when he was gone so that he wouldn't know about it.

Int: What would you see if you went to Atchee today?

Inf: You'd just see a lot of brush and weeds and some trees that's dying. And of course the old round house is, the older stone part of it is still there. That's all. You'll have to look real close to know when you get there.

Int: Until a few years ago, Gilsonite was still coming out of the area--what happened to Atchee, really?

Inf: Well, now they have, they have a good road up to the Pass. And they've been maintaining it. Of course Gilsonite maintained

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that road through there on the old railroad bed because of their pipeline. See, they had a pipeline that comes from Bonanza and to the plant down here at (unintelligible). And so they maintained a road. And now Gary-Western, they are maintaining it. They're going to have the same thing. See they built the pipeline on into Rangely. And so it will be just the same thing. They will have to maintain it for ... (pauses) so they can service their pipeline.

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The pipeline is a very unique thing. It crosses over a 9000 foot pass from Bonanza. It crosses the White River and up over that pass and down into the county of Fruita.

Int: Incredible. When you were at your store you sold things to all the railroaders ...

Inf: Oh yes, but to Indians, too. See the Indians had come over to their reservation on Bitter Creek in the summer time. And then Atchee was their closest store where they could get food. And we had quite a number of interesting experiences with that. And one of them was old <gap> and he was a brother to <gap>. And he, well, for quite some time he would come in that store and he wouldn't let no one wait on him but me. Oh, and I just couldn't hardly stand that. If you see him, you can know. Because he was far from clean. But one day he come over by himself. And he come in and he had on a dress suit and a high hat. And he was all trigged-out and had a black tie. And we wasn't very busy in the store, so my husband and I was re-stocking and cleaning and, so he come in and walked right up to my husband and he said, "I come over to buy your squaw." And well of course then I really had my ears tuned-

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in to what he would say. And my husband, he looked around at me and he knew right away that I was not going for that and so he said, "Well what'll you give me for her--my squaw?" And he said, "Two cows." And (unintelligible) he said, "My, she's worth more than that. Why, look at her--she's young, and she's strong and why, she's do lots of work." But about that time I got about all of the trade I wanted and so I went out the back door and went home. So after awhile I come back when I saw his horse was gone. And I said, "Well, how much am I worth?" He said, "Four cows and two horses." (laughs). Well he always

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liked to put his hand on my head because he, my hair was red, and naturally it's red, and so he thought that red hair was really something.

Int: What kind--he was a Ute?

Inf: Yeah, they're Ute.

Int: The reservation is where? I don't know that.

Inf: At (unintelligible). The reservation, they come for their summer range over on Bitter Creek, and then they'd come on down into the store. And Indians are very, very fond of watermelon. So that just as soon as they'd come on the market my husband would always go down and get a load of watermelons. And of course bucks would come in the store and buy those watermelons and go out back of the store and eat them. But I never, would they ask for the women, to share (unintelligible). Well, my husband is an, was an old Southerner, he couldn't stand that so he'd always tow all of them along to feed the squaws. So he was very popular with the Indian women.

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Int: I hear you had other jobs sometimes besides running the store. Like (unintelligible).

Inf: Yeah, oh yes. I'd (unintelligible) when they'd, the clerks would get tired and stand up there in the mountains and come down, and why they didn't have a clerk, why I would go over and work in the office. At the railroad and at the mine, too. I was kind of a doctor, nurse, and what have you up there. Because when they had a wreck on the railroad, why, they always come to me to go up and see what I could do. And the Indians called on me

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just the same. One night about, oh, 9:30, ten o'clock I, a young Indian boy come running in and come right on in our apartment. And he said that, to me, "Come with me, come with me!" And I looked over at my husband and he said, "Well, you better go." And I said, "Well, if you's going, I will." And I got over there, and they always, they always built a wickiup across the wash from the store. And he take me over there and I soon seen what was happening. His little wife was having a baby. So we got hot water and sheets and what have you and we welcomed in that little Ute Indian baby. Next morning I thought, "Well, I'll go over there and see how she's doing, getting along." And I looked up and I saw them going out over the mountain, home. She was riding a horse and carrying that baby.

Int: Pioneer life.

Inf: Yeah. Well, it was interesting and we had lots of happy times. In the winter we'd ski and coast and dance. And so...

Int: How many years were you up there?

Inf: Eighteen.

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Int: Is that right! And about the school ...

Inf: We had, when we first went up there it was in a small building. But two teachers. Then after they built the new school building, why they had, they still had those two teachers, but had room. And they taught up to the ninth grade.

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Int: Was Atchee ever incorporated as a town?

Inf: No.

Int: Then who kind of governed it?

Inf: The Uintah Railroad officials.

Int: Now were they affiliated with the D&RG?

Inf: No, oh no. They was Gilsonite.

Int: Did they connect with the D&RG?

Inf: Yeah.

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